



QUEST FOR LOVE AND THIRST FOR DEATH IN THE POETRY OF KAMALA DAS AND SYLVIA PLATH

Dr. P. Kadhivelu

Principal, Thiruvalluvar Arts and Science College, Kurinjipadi, Cuddalore, Tamilnadu
(Former HOD of English, TKG Arts College, Vridhachalam, Tamilnadu)

Abstract:

Confessional literature sincerely conveys the secrets of love and death. The themes are open declarations of aspirations and ugliness of life at the cost of its pleasure and beauty. Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das have made a sincere quest in search of Love and Death which turned materials for Confessional Genre. All her life she has come across only physical love and has never enjoyed genuine love. Her wish for spiritual love has made her write confessional poetry. Plath's love for Ted Hughes, his desertion and her wish for resurrection to slaughter all men in the world for their untrue love and negligence of women folks have turned the themes of her poetry. Kamala Das' quest for spiritual love has become the subject matter for her writings. Secrets in the personal life of the both have activated them to create confessional literature. Confessional writings are very much accepted and appreciated for its genuineness and expediency.

Quest for Love and Thirst for Death in the Poetry of Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath:

Confessional poetry is a contemporary art acknowledged for its sincerity which creates a lot of openings to establish a telepathic connection between the poets and the readers. It genuinely communicates the psycho-diagnostic and magical thoughts without religious conviction and moral principles. Confessional literature relieves the writer as well as the audience from the stress of humdrum existence. The heart of confessional literature is highly skewed and delicate. It adopts the style of a monologue. The themes are frankly uncomfortable and simply focusing upon the pains and pleasures of life. Sylvia Plath is a celebrated American poet of this genus. Kamala Das has also come up as a representative for this type of writing in India without the influence of the West. These two women have looked at life in a dissimilar way. The disagreement with the society has caused inner pressure which gets distorted into fine true confessional works. Restlessness and disappointment in love naturally compel a person to commit suicide. The hurl between love and death provides a plenty of scope for spanking new expressions. Victory and collapse in hunt of love and death have crammed the minds of writers with a lot of resources suitable for creation of confessional genre. This has become accurate in case of Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das.

The phrase "Confession" was first used by M.L. Rosenthal, an American Poet and Critic for the works of Robert Lowell. The heart of this type of poetry is filled generally by sexuality, homosexuality, lesbianism, death, suicide and social insecurity. The current analysis is to talk about the poetry of Sylvia Plath (1932-1963), an American short story writer, poet and novelist. She loves and marries Ted Hughes, a fellow poet in 1965 and had two kids Frieda and Nicholas. Plath commits suicide following an indescribable dejection caused by conjugal partition. Pangs of separation and wish for love have induced her to write honest poetry. The study besides throws light on the poetry of Kamala Das, a frank Indian poet. The emotional conflict of Kamala Das with her husband, Mr. Das has led her to find a great relief in writing poetry. Her Autobiographic subjective work *My Story* honestly brings about her extramarital relationships and her husband's homosexual liaisons. The two writers expose their diviner thoughts of women affected by marital and disquieting conflicts.

In Confessional Poetry the writers follow direct contact with the readers using persona, pseudonyms and masks. But Ted Hughes says that Plath uses autobiographical facts in a more symbolic way than Lowell. Plath has started writing poetry at the age of eight and Das, at six. Plath's first poem has appeared in Boston Newspaper at the age of eight. Plath and Das are child prodigies and have begun their confessions right from their childhood.

Das says,

The poet's raw material is not stone or clay; it is her personality¹.

Plath opines:

One's real world is not what is outside him.

It is immeasurable world inside him that is real.²

The poetry of the both is wistful and reflective of their childhood. This is exposed in the words of Plath:

Child, by candle light for a fatherless son³.

Das' recall of her grandma's house is as: I lived in such a house and was proud and loved³. Likewise Plath also makes mentions of her grandma as: she died blessed and I come by Bones, Bones only...⁴.

Both have disgusted male supremacy and inferior treatment of women as lifeless object. Conception of love, frustration and failure has fine phrases in their poetry. They mutually say that loving a man is easy but living with him is difficult. Plath does not like the treatment of women by men as objects:

It (wife) can sew,

'It can cook'

'It can talk, talk, talk⁵.

Inner terrible fury in the mind of Plath has been caused by the unequal treatments of women by men. Her rage on men has infused suicidal thoughts in her mind.

Plath after separation has loved non but death in her life. She construed that death alone can relieve her from the pains of life. The love for death drives her to commit suicide. The death wish is the recurrent theme of her poetry. Death for her is a blue razor at throat⁵. Plath has just loved death and attempted to taste suicide...dying is not a painful end but an art⁸, whereas Das considers it a reward for pains. Both are writing for therapeutic relief from the ashes of life. Society may regard them as neurotics and lunatics but it fails to understand their search for genuine love of man. Plath portrays suicide and death as.. eternal oblivion¹⁰. To eliminate the father figure from her memory, she says: Daddy, I have had to kill you. You died before I had time ¹¹. Plath suffers from father fixation or Electra complex which is obvious in a poem on Daddy: I was ten when they buried you. At twenty I tried to die and get back, back to you¹². She, like all women, does not like aging and brings it out in a poem called *Mirror*: In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman rises towards her day after day..¹³. She has great fascination for red and white Tulips. They appear to remind her inner wounds of life. Frequently they seem to terrorize her with their openings; They (Tulips) are opening like the mouth of some great African cat.¹⁵.

In her poem *Lady Lazarus* Plath confirms her strong faith in rebirth and resurrection: Out of the ash I rise with my red hair and I eat men like air¹⁶. It further makes obvious her repulsion on men. She believes that Suicide, Death and Resurrection may fetch her eternal happiness. That is why, it seems, she loves death. She further has strong conviction in resurrection to slay all men-traitors in the world. She suggestively shows her bitterness on her husband for his desertion from her life. Naturally all men

and women have the sense of repugnance to their mates while facing desertion. Divorce is very common in the West but Plath could not digest Ted Hughes' separation and his loveless life with her. Women folks expect true love from men. When they find the love of man is only corporeal and fake, they turn brutal and commit suicide or choose to kill their husbands at least in next birth.

While modern American confessional poets like Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath are pondering over death and revenge, Kamala Das is pursuing her deep search for soulful love in the poem *Composition*: By peeling of my layers I reach closer to the soul...¹⁷. M.K.Naik calls her a Confessional Poet and compares her with Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath. But he comments that her poetry is a sex dominated one which is clear in the poem *The Looking Glass*... the musk of sweat between the breasts,...the warm shock of menstrual blood.

Das continues her search for true love from man to man and door to door. Her desire for love is made very obvious in *The Old play House and Other Poems*...I lost my way and beg now at strangers' doors to receive love,...¹⁸. She compares her husband's kisses on her cheeks as maggots rolling over the corpse because loveless sex is revolting and contemptible for her. Throughout her life she has received only physical love and never enjoyed true spiritual love from men including her husband. Her writings are well known for a bold frankness which is scarcely found among the Indian women writers in English. Das is an intrepid poet of love and sex. Her courage in declaration of guilt has elevated her to the height of global reputation and put her on same level with American women writers like Anne sexton and Sylvia Plath.

While speaking of unloving old husbands, she remarks in *The Stone Age*: Fond husband, Ancient settlers in the mind, old fat spider, weaving webs of bewilderment, be kind...¹⁹. These words sincerely bring out the loveless mechanical liaison between husband and wife. Srinivasa Iyengar comments that her poetry is highly individualistic which is very much rare among Indian writers.

Plath has a genuine love for Ted Hughes and kills herself for his desertion. She has no love another man. She craves for resurrection to slaughter all men in the world for their untrue love and negligence of women. She has tried thrice for suicide and tasted death. But Das desires to have more love alternatives in her quest for soul where as Plath has chosen none. Plath's love is stable and real; it craves for revenge on men for their forsaking; but Das' love is fluctuating and dappled; and frequently misused for the hunt of true love. Though she has tried in a number of ways to find out men with the real love, she has had disappointments only. She construes that women's love is genuine but men's love is fake.

They have made their confessions in their autobiographical novels. Plath's *Bell Jar* and Kamala Das' *My Story* are published by which they unlocked their hearts and upset the world. The confessional poets are hailed as neurotics by the society for their glaring openness with regard to their secrets of life. Kamala Das' awful announcement about the theme of love has disturbed everyone in the society. She being a traditional woman has broken the chains of customs and conventions. The quest for ideal love is persistent throughout her poetry. She makes her search for love from skin to soul. She has become sick of bodily love which is just skin-deep.:

..... what is the use, what is the bloody use?
That was the only kind of love,
This hacking at each other's part
Like convicts hacking, breaking clods
At noon [Convicts].

Sometimes, she is not an adept to find out a difference between love & lust and gets provoked:

O sea, I am fed up
I want to be simple
I want to be loved
And if love is not to be had,
I want to be dead, just dead ... (The Suicide).

Sylvia Plath too has handled the idea in an amazing way. She has a very few poems on theme of love, compared to Kamala Das. Plath belongs to the lenient society of the West where none has raised the brows either for extra or pre-marital affairs. Though Confessional literature has created great sensations in society, it never fails to bring out their quest for love and death with the admiration of the reading public.

Confessional Poetry, known as the Poetry of the 'I', is personal and universal at once. The female personae in the works of Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath voice intensely personal agony which extends beyond the female. In Das and Plath, Quest for love and thirst for death become universal motifs which break through gender barriers.

References:

1. Das, Kamala, My Story, Kottayam, 2000, p.124.
2. Plath, Sylvia, 'Point Sherley', The collected Poems, London: Hopper and row, 1984, p.110-111.
3. Plath, Sylvia, 'Point Sherley', The collected Poems, London: Hopper and row, 1984, p.110-111.
4. Das, Kamala, 'The Suicide' The Old Playhouse and Other Poems, Madras: Orient Longman, 1973.35.
5. Plath, Sylvia, The Collected Poems, p.182.
6. Das, Kamala, 'The Suicide' The Old Playhouse and Other Poems, Madras: Orient Longman, 1973.35.
7. <http://www.neuroticpoets.com/plath/poem/electra/Electra on Azalea Plath>.
8. <http://www.eliteskills.com/c/12632> - <http://www.sylvia Plath Forum.com/ll.ht>
9. Das, Kamala, My Story, New Delhi: Sterling Pub.Pvt.Ltd.1988, p.215.
10. <http://www.womenwriters.net/editorials/whitton0500.htm>.
11. Plath, Sylvia, Daddy, Ariel New York: Harper and Row, 1966, p.49.
12. Plath, Sylvia, Daddy, Ariel New York: Harper and Row, 1966, p.57.
13. Plath, Sylvia, Mirror, Literature: Approaches To Fiction, Poetry and drama, 6th ed. Ed.Robbert de Yanni, New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004, Line17-18.
14. http://www.english.illinoise.edu/maps/poets/m_r/plath/tullips.htm.
15. Plath, Sylvia. Lady Lazarus, Ariel New York: Harper and Row, 1966, p.7.
16. Das, Kamala, The Old Playhouse and Other Poems, Orient Blackswan, p.7.
17. Das, Kamala, The Suicide, The Old Playhouse and Other Poems, Madras: Orient Longman, 1973, p.32.
18. Das, Kamala, A Critical Spectrum, Atlantic Publishers and Distributers (p) LTD, 2001-2007, p.21.